

A Dangerous Vase

By MSgt Jeffrey J. Chandler, Offutt AFB, Neb.

Ever used a magnifying glass to start a fire? Well, that concept hit a little too close to MSgt Mike Stenger's home last year.

The days were bright and sunny in America's heartland when his wife noticed a burn spot on the solid oak table they have in their kitchen. At first, they thought a hot pan or candle had caused the burn mark, but neither of them could remember setting something down in that location. They had recently placed a glass vase — you know, the kind with water, rocks, and plant roots that just kind of float around — on the table and started to suspect that the vase might be focusing sunrays onto the table and burning it — just like a magnifying glass.

Although MSgt Stenger thought this was unlikely, he removed the vase from the table and conducted a test during his lunch break the next day. He placed the vase on a scrap piece of wood in front of the glass patio door and sure enough, in just a few minutes, the wood started to blacken and even smoke slightly! Needless to say, the Stenger household no longer has the vase in the direct sunlight.

The vase had been on that table for over a week. Both worked during the day so they were never at home to smell or see the smoke that resulted from the sun shining through the sliding glass doors and the vase

onto the table. I have absolutely no idea how intense light has to be to burn wood, but I can remember that it did not take long at all to burn things using a cheap magnifying glass. Can you imagine what might have happened if the vase had been sitting on a lace tablecloth or doily? What if a newspaper or

paper napkins had been close by? Thankfully, the Stenger family was able to avert a tragedy, but their story really makes one stop and take another look at what is around us.

We should all do this both at home and in our work areas. We should also do more to consider our surroundings and what impact there might be when we introduce something new. A good rule of thumb is to always let your supervisors know when you bring things from home into your office. Items like portable

electric heaters, fans, and individual coffee pots may need to meet certain requirements before they can be used. Additionally, many maintenance and industrial areas require such things to be rated or certified. Prior approval is always a must.

The Stenger's experience provides all of us with a valuable lesson learned about nature's fire-starting power. What seemed ordinary and harmless had the potential to cause great destruction. Each of us can do our part by bringing similar things to the attention of our supervisors, spouses, friends, or manufacturers of a particular product. Sharing what you have learned is one of the important keys to mishap prevention. ▶

The wood started to blacken and smoke!

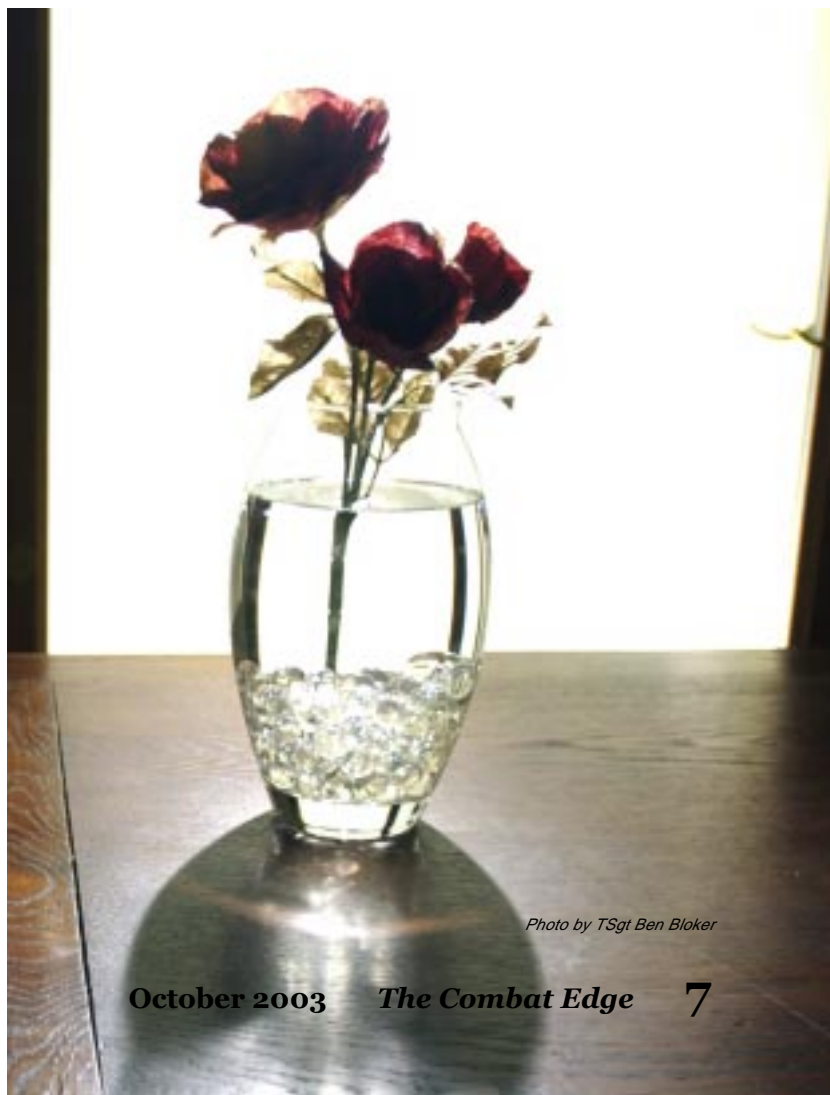


Photo by TSgt Ben Bloker